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ABSTRACT

This paper takes the SUNY (State University of New York) Learning Network faculty development program, which helps faculty and their students incorporate technology in their courses, the perspective of one educator who decided to participate in the program because online teaching would help him adapt to the current changes in higher education. The paper then describes the learning and student-centered approach which is one of the characteristics of online teaching. It does not present data on the effectiveness of learning via the computer or discuss issues related to online learning. To draw attention to the many ways in which teachers shift their perspective from a lecture-oriented approach to a learning-centered approach to teaching, the paper explains in detail how a teacher prepares for the course--in this case, "Interpersonal Conflict"--and how he actually teaches online. The paper suggests that advocates of online learning and traditional teaching may learn from one another. (Contains 16 references.) (NKA)

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FACULTY DEVELOPMENT AT SUNY:

SHIFTING FROM TEACHING TO LEARNING

by

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FACULTY DEVELOPMENT AT SUNY:

SHIFTING FROM TEACHING TO LEARNING

> Continuing to postpone the incorporation of technology into course work will only perpetuate today's two-classed computer society of the user and the nonuser. Those mastering even the basics of telecommunications technology and its related access tools will be the information "have's." Those who harbor anxiety and fear, which in turn leads to frustration and failure, will be perpetual technological "have-nots." -- Bailey & Cotlar, (1994)

To help faculty and their students incorporate technology in their courses, faculty development at many SUNY community colleges, four year colleges, university centers has embraced educational technology. At many of the institutions faculty receive training in lecturing via presentation software (e.g., Power Point), making assignments online (computer assisted instruction), and offering part or all of a course (distance learning) via either video conferencing or (text based) computer conferencing over the Internet.

For the past few years, a major effort has been undertaken by the SUNY Learning Network (SLN) to train faculty interested in online teaching via (text-based) computer conferencing. An asynchronous learning network (ALN), SLN has developed an approach to teaching and learning that is student-centered and eliminates the constraints of time and location that higher education usually places on students.

In addition to eliminating time and space barriers for students, SLN provides a program for faculty development. The SLN program provides a comprehensive Faculty development and course design approach that includes an online faculty resource and information gateway, an online conference for past and present course developers, an online faculty orientation, a series of workshops for new faculty, instructional design sessions for returning faculty looking to improve their courses, a print developer's handbook that is also online and searchable, a course template, a faculty helpdesk, online mechanisms for faculty evaluation of SLN services, and an assigned instructional design partner. The course is offered by the faculty member's institution. Teaching the course is considered part of her/his normal teaching course load, and students must register for the class at the faculty member's institution.

Supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and SUNY System Administration, SLN began training a handful of faculty to teach 8 courses in 1995-1996. Since that time, growth has been exponential. There were 34 courses offered in the 1996-1997, 180 offered in 1997-1998 and 460 courses offered in 1998-1999. Today SLN is a comprehensive system-wide program that allows students to take courses via the Internet following the concepts of anywhere anytime. In what is the first and among the most successful large-scale distance learning system in the country, there are over 10,000 student enrollments expected in approximately 1000 SLN-supported online

courses taught by faculty at 42 SUNY campuses for the 99/00 academic year (see SLN Website in reference section).

Of the seven classes I teach each academic year, I offer one entitled "Interpersonal Conflict" entirely online during the fall semester and in conjunction with SLN. The course is a semester long and is limited to an enrollment of 20 students. I am presently offering the course online for the fourth time. Unless I encounter the online students in my FtoF classes (traditional, face-to-face classroom) I do not see or physically meet them. Students order assigned texts from our college bookstore, use their own computers or those in public labs, and like the professor are responsible for arranging their own Internet connection to access the course online.

I originally decided to participate in the SLN faculty development program because I thought online teaching would help me adapt to changes that I was witnessing in higher education. These changes were as follows:

- Today's students need visual/nonverbal stimulation along with oral/verbal information (students need to observe as well as listen and take notes).

- Rather than learning only facts, dates, and statistics that they may soon forget, students need to engage in active learning processes. Similarly, there is a need to obtain and maintain students' attention by involving them and by getting them to think, express their thoughts and feelings, and share their experiences (Students need more process type assignments and learning styles).

- There is a need for students to feel important and to feel that they have some say and control over their learning.

- Students have been brought up on television and now the computer; so they need multi-dimensional exposure to course content (as opposed to the traditional, linear, oral lecture).

- Teachers and courses should respond immediately to student needs, desires, concerns, problems which may be expressed at any time; feedback is important and teachers need to adapt to the student.

- Teachers need flexibility in teaching so that they can add or subtract material during the class period, provide information when needed, substitute alternative activities, and perhaps meet in different locations if appropriate.

- More and more students are working and/or parenting with extremely hectic schedules that interfere with regularly scheduled class hours. Others are on internships or otherwise absent from the campus for a semester preventing them from enrolling in campus courses with regularly scheduled class hours.

- Many students need to master computer skills in preparation for an online world; many are simply curious about technology and interested in learning more Internet and computer skills.

I believe that the potential of online learning offers teachers the opportunity to meet these objectives. Moreover, future technologies may enable teachers to create courses that are unimaginable today.

Another factor that caused me to agree to participate in the SLN faculty development program was that I realized that the way I taught my course in Interpersonal Conflict in the classroom would lend itself nicely to the SLN approach to teaching. Both in the classroom and in the online course, I expose students to principles of communication (and conflict), assign them the task of observing conflicts or adapting these principles to situations they actually encounter, and then have them share and discuss their observations, experiences, and analyses with everyone in class. This way, they get themselves into and out of situations in face to face encounters with people in real life situations or observe others doing so and then discuss these experiences in class or online with the rest of us. In addition, I can include in my online course the ungraded quizzes, readings from a textbook, and graded papers as "take-home tests" that I use in my FtoF class.

While all this is something that I can accomplish in a traditional FtoF classroom, the move to an online environment has enabled me to create an electronic version of the course, one which reaches students who might otherwise not enroll in it. Others are simply curious about technology and interested in learning more Internet and computer skills. They generally report that this course meets their specific and unique needs.

In meeting the needs of nontraditional students, involvement with SLN has caused me to experience a shift from what I call the teaching- or lecturing-oriented model to a learning- or student-centered approach to education. The learning orientation exists in the preparation phase for teaching the course, later when actually teaching the course online, and finally in the course evaluation phase where students express their opinion about their learning experiences. I believe that this change in orientation offers a great deal to the communication teacher who wants her or his students to actively engage the subject, interact frequently with the teacher, and collaborate with fellow students. Like others who have experienced a shift in perspective when using educational technology (McComb, 1994), I have also learned from the experience.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the learning and student-centered approach, which is one of the characteristics of online teaching. It is not the purpose here to present data on the effectiveness of learning via the computer or to discuss issues related to online learning which have been treated elsewhere (see Special Issue in reference section). By explaining how a teacher prepares for the course and actually teaches online, I can draw attention to the many ways in which teachers shift their perspective from a lecture oriented approach to a learning-

centered approach to teaching. For those of you who have been teaching full time in the classroom for a number of years, you may find the shift from one perspective to the other to be a refreshing change. If you like intellectual challenges, opportunities to be creative, and opportunities to make new friends, you may want to try teaching a course online.

Developing the Course Ahead of Time

A unique experience for many faculty when they move to online teaching is the necessity of developing their course with others prior to the semester they teach it. "Developing" is the name given to the preparation phase that precedes actually teaching or delivering the course even for the first time. While some more traditional teachers had a rough idea of what they would cover in a course but deal with specifics class day-by-day, On-line course management requires that the teacher develop the entire course during the semester prior to its offering. This means that all the objectives, readings that can be placed online, structured schedule of learning activities, written versions of lectures (if any), discussion questions, handouts, instructions on how to do assignments, quizzes, and papers must be made available online prior to the first day of class. This also requires anticipating any number of potential problems and building in mechanisms for preventing them. Although some changes in the teaching plan may be made "on the fly," there is no "winging it" as an overall strategy in online teaching.

Prospective teachers of SLN courses are referred to as course developers who are trained to work as a team with Instructional Design partners that are also experts in the technology used to develop and teach the course. There is a 4-stage faculty development process and a 7-step course design process that begins with a computer conference for course developers, readings about distance learning, and includes the opportunity to observe "live" online courses. During the past two years, I have served as the moderator for the online developers' conference. The development cycle also includes three FtoF meetings that initiate the course design process and bring together new online teachers, experienced course developers, instructional design experts, and other SLN staff. In addition, course developers are given a step by step training print manual and a host of online resources and materials to help guide and support them during the course design phase. The SLN Faculty Development process facilitates the transition from a "teaching orientation" to a learning orientation (SLN Course Developer Handbook, 1999). Essentially, the training has the following impact on the teacher's perspective:

Course Management

After teaching online, Hiltz (1995) realized that the content of her course constituted a significant "mass of material" and claimed that:

> Unless this mass of material is organized, students will become very confused. The instructor must establish regular rhythms and schedules, based on dividing the course into modules ..., so that the participants can plan ahead in terms of when they will need to sign online and when work will be due, and so the group moves through the topics in

an orderly manner. (p. 192).

For this reason, SLN requires that a course be subdivided into a series of learning modules, each with its own objectives and learning activities for accomplishing these goals. These modules may parallel the organization of a traditional FtoF classroom course, but they need not necessarily do so. Learning activities are all the online and offline tasks and assignments the students do in the course. The teacher must also determine how the learning activities are to be evaluated.

Each module begins with an overview, followed by introductory materials (such as a "mini-lecture"). Students are then asked to perform some task such as reading in a textbook, creating a written assignment, participating in an exercise, discussion, or project. Finally, the learning activities must be evaluated. Incidentally, the methods of evaluation are also made explicit to the students in online documents. I also include the work of previous students as models (with their permission, or course) for later online classes.

To develop an activity, the teacher must consider the sequencing of activities based on an assessment of the needs, experience, and prior knowledge of the students. The teacher must also consider the quantity of assignments based on the quantity and quality of work normally expected from students in a FtoF class. Finally, the teacher must consider the pacing of the activities for each module because some exercises may take longer online than they normally do in the traditional classroom. For example, discussion that may take place during a class period in the FtoF classroom may need to be spread out over a few days online. Moreover, I have found that initially students are slower to meet online deadlines than they do in the FtoF classroom; so I have learned to allow more time for assignments at the beginning of the online course, but encourage students to pick up the pace a few weeks later after they have had time to adjust to the online learning experience.

Because SLN supports a wide variety of courses, unique design issues must be worked out by the course developer and her/his instructional design partner. An online teacher needs a high degree of receptivity to suggestions and flexibility for considering alternative ways to adapt a course or a learning activity to the online environment. While an online teacher may find that many of her/his previous assignments can be included in an online course, some may need to be reconceptualized to accomplish the learning objectives and to adapt to the limitations, or to take advantage of the increased possibilities of online learning. For example, in the FtoF class it is a simple task to pair up students or form small groups for communication activities, but such tasks become more challenging online. The differences become more obvious when a teacher incorporates a complex interactive activity such as the "Prisoner's Dilemma" which is a highly organized game-like simulation that places teams of students in competition with each other. While in a FtoF classroom a teacher may organize a class of students for the activity and conduct a discussion over the activity, it would take a great deal of time and effort on my part to run the activity online and then to conduct a discussion afterwards. It might be simpler online to read about the activity and discuss it than to try to actually engage the students in simulation.

Meanwhile the online students' reflection on their reading may show more insight than the FtoF class discussion even though those students actually participated in the exercise. At this time in the course development cycle, thought also needs to be given to work load and effectiveness of course management for both the student and the teacher.

Navigation from the Students' Point of View

Secondly, to help students navigate through the course, the teacher should organize the course in a visually simple and logical format called a "course map" using an online form or "template" supplied by SLN. It organizes the course into three sections: Orientation/Syllabus, Course Modules, and Other Course Areas.

When I developed my first course I thought my students would master all my orientation and syllabus documents, follow the logic of my plan, understand the organization of my course, and remember all the deadline dates. I was not prepared for the problems they experienced navigating through the documents, understanding the "big picture" and remembering specific instructions and dates. So, as recommended in the SLN handbook, here is what I do when teaching online.

> I use an overview document for each module so that students have an immediate view of the work that will be covered, what they will be doing, when it is due, etc.
>
> I put deadline dates and key reminders in multiple places.
>
> I put due dates in the *subject lines* of written and discussion assignments.

Seeing the Course as the Student Sees It Online

Thirdly, during development, I use the Internet to "walk through my online course." This step is a way of viewing the course on the Internet from the perspective of my students that is different from the one I normally use in the SLN course template. By using the student Website to access one's course, the teacher sees how the course will be used by the students. Regardless of the skill level of the teacher, some documents appear differently on the Web than intended. For example, tags, indents, and spacing may not appear or appear in ways on intended in the Internet version of the course documents. In addition, when viewed in its entirety, the walk through reveals problems that students may encounter when they attempt to navigate through the course. SLN provides a checklist to facilitate the walk through.

Helping Students Locate and Adapt to the Online Course

Fourthly, before the first day of classes, the teacher and her/his campus need to do a number of preliminary tasks such as sending an information letter to the students, creating a Welcome e-mail, and engaging in ways to overcome students' misperceptions, for example, that the course is entirely self-paced when it is not.

Information Letter to Students (Snail Mail)

Before I taught online, I took for granted that students knew what to expect when registering for my online class. However, many in fact had no idea what to expect. Here were some of the expectations I heard when asking students at random before they took an online course:

Some thought we would have to meet FtoF especially at first.

Others thought they would be able to use computer labs almost anywhere in the state such as at a local community college or here at my college. They also assumed that someone would be present in the lab to help them -- someone who knew all about the online courses.

Others thought these computer labs would be open 24 hrs a day including weekends and vacation periods. They did not expect to find them closed or crowded with some students playing games while others who needed to get to a computer to meet a course deadline had to wait.

Others thought their 10 year old computer with 2 meg ram and a slow speed modem would be sufficient to do the course, when it was not.

Some thought that they could sign on 2 or 3 weeks after classes began. Others thought they could sign on if and when they pleased (anytime, anywhere) which meant about twice a month.

Many thought they could skip the SLN Student Orientation. This tutorial trains students to navigate the online course, to practice some online exercises that are similar to those in online courses, and to learn how to upload assignments to the professor.

Many had no idea of where to begin. "What is a Website?" one asked.

Some thought the teacher was supposed to help them with their technical, hardware, and software problems.

Because so many students had misconceptions or no conceptions about what to expect, I found it necessary to send a letter (via snail mail) to give students basic information before they signed on to the SLN Website.

Here are some items I have included in a letter to students:

A warm welcome or greeting,

Date of the first day of my class

The need for an Internet Service Provider (ISP), wordprocessor, sufficient hardware/software SLN URL/Website to find my course

Very strong encouragement to complete the SLN Student Orientation (tutorial) before anything else. Encourage students to get a password and complete the tutorial a few days before the 1st day of class.

Basic information on using online course navigation

The importance of meeting deadlines.

Listing of places for students to turn for help depending on whether the problem is with their own equipment, their ISP, their college computer lab, or SLN.

Hours of operation for local college computer labs

Telephone numbers for SLN, teacher's office hours and telephone number (very few ever telephoned me), and e-mail address.

Information about the required textbook and readings with an explanation of how to order them, including the first reading assignment.

It may be noted that some of the information contained in this letter is similar to the information many teachers give their students on the first day of class, with additional information about the SLN experience.

A Welcome E-Mail

I create a "welcome" e-mail for my students and a reply to the student's first e-mail to the teacher. The teacher should also imagine the type of technical difficulties students will encounter and determine how s/he will respond to students who request such help. This is also a good time to learn how students actually enroll in one's online class and get access to it online. In spite of these attempts to anticipate the student's experience, the teacher later discovers that many students encounter a variety of unforeseen problems.

Overcoming the Misconception that the Course is Entirely Self-Paced.

I also stress the importance of doing the SLN Student Orientation (tutorial) in my course syllabus and allow a few days for the students to get going online. I make it clear in the orientation/syllabus that the course is not self-paced and that deadlines must be met with late papers receiving lower grades.

Taking a course online may be compared to something like climbing a steep hill. Some students physically may be unable to climb the hill, some may not know where it is and climb the wrong one, and still others may need a taller ladder or stronger rope to pull themselves up the incline. Generally, some may not show because they cannot make it, while others may falter because they lack the motivation. However, most if not all can make it with a little help.

Teaching the Class

I am used to meeting practically all the students enrolled in my FtoF courses on the first day of class. So, the first semester that I taught my course online, I assumed that students would be ready to learn on the first day of class, and I planned my course outline accordingly. Well, things didn't go as planned. I was surprised at the many students who didn't show for a few days or had problems getting started. It would help if the students would do the SLN Student Orientation (tutorial) a week before classes begin, but some put it off until after they joined the class. At any rate, I learned the next time I taught the class to allow a few days for the students to get going online and to make it clear in the orientation/syllabus the importance of the student orientation and deadlines.

Responsiveness to Students: E-mail and Virtual Office Hours

The conversion from physical to virtual office hours via e-mail is itself more student-oriented because it often increases student accessibility to the teacher. Online teaching usually includes virtual office hours that are primarily conducted via e-mail (with perhaps a few telephone calls). I can recall how I was reluctant to give my e-mail address to students; however, like many faculty I have learned that my fears were not justified, and e-mail has improved my communication with students.

In an online course, E-mail should be used primarily for private messages between student and instructor. Non-private messages or those that would in someway benefit others in class should be posted in sections of the course such as the Bulletin Board, Class Discussion, or Question Areas where everyone in class can see the message and its replies.

Online teaching also requires that the teacher be responsive to student requests for information or help. With a class of 20 students, I have learned that it is best to log on one or more times each day to answer student questions that appear in learning activities, to read and participate in student online discussions, and to reply to e-mail. While I may receive from my online students only one or two e-mail messages or questions each day, there are usually a number of messages from students embedded in the course itself, where they participate in online discussion or complete written assignments. So as not to be overwhelmed by all the activity, I find it useful to log on the course daily for about 30 minutes to an hour, except on days when I grade papers online which takes a great deal longer to do. Of course, I can log on at any time day or night. Unfortunately, some students initially have the impression that a teacher is constantly

monitoring the course, and it may take them awhile to grant the teacher the same asynchronous advantages teaching the class as students have in taking the course.

Computer Conferencing

Perhaps the biggest difference in online learning is the shift from lecturing in the classroom to computer conferencing. A computer conference is an electronic conference organized by subject or topic, which becomes a common resource for later reference, manipulation, and future discussion. According to Eastmond (1992), the use of computer conferencing in education in the US favors egalitarian, student-centered, and discussion approaches to teaching.

"Since many fear that the move toward distance learning will reduce levels of human interaction in the learning process, interactivity is an imperative and foundational principle that should guide (asynchronous learning) courses" (Jaffee, p. 268). Computer conferencing is synonymous with interactivity in a number of ways:

- Computer conferencing offers heightened interaction for both large and small groups.
- It is convenient, asynchronous -- not limited to time or place (a 24 hr class/discussion).
- Participants can "speak" without interruption and have more time to reflect, synthesize, and apply ideas before responding.
- Participation is more equal than FtoF discussion where vocal personalities may dominate the group.
- It is useful for sharing or collecting information.

By using computer conferencing to tailor the instructional experience to individual student needs and interests, the online teacher creates a facilitative and interactive teaching style characteristic of a learning-oriented approach.

Class Discussion as Computer Conferencing

Because class discussion is a key contributor to the building of a "classroom experience" (i.e., community, sense of presence of class members) (Hiltz, 1994) and because verbalization to others is related to concept attainment (Harasim, 1990), I think it should be fully utilized both online and off. Many teachers who find that some students are reluctant to speak up in class and that too many students are unprepared for FtoF discussion without the fear of "pop quizzes" are pleasantly surprised by the depth of online discussion (Christiansen, 1997). Because of my own background in problem solving, conflict resolution, and interpersonal communication, I make participation in the online class discussion an important factor in determining the final course grade (the grades on the take-home tests/papers are the most important).

To keep students involved, I try to post open-ended and thought-provoking questions over the course readings for the students to discuss at the beginning and at the end of each week. However, a colleague has taken the student-oriented approach a step further and asks his students to devise the questions themselves over course content for class discussion. By grading the questions and discussion and by teaching students to thoughtfully develop and carefully word the questions, he has developed a system that involves the students in a great deal of online discussion.

In my general instructions on classroom discussion, I ask the students to (1) respond to each discussion question at least once and (2) respond to another student's response. This way every student offers an insight and comments on the insights of others. If I only asked for number one, the "discussion" would resemble the spokes of a wheel with me at the center, but by also asking for number two, students are more likely to respond to each other and the discussion eventually looks more like a tangled fishnet. As part of the discussion grade, I also assign each student to summarize one entire class discussion. This summary helps us all see the classroom discussion as a whole and everyone's part in it. As a student said to me after the course was over, "There was a lot of interaction in this course, even though we were not face to face" (Cahn, 1997).

In addition to explaining how to adequately participate in electronic discussion and devising the discussion questions, at times I also play a role in keeping the discussion going or "weaving." As explained by Davie (1989), "I encourage, help to show how some (messages) can fit into others, mediate differences between participants, suggest ways in which the conversation might go deeper and comment on group process." (p. 82)

Getting the Discussion Started

To help get a good class discussion going online, I first provide information ahead of time about accessing the discussions and about their value and importance in the course.

When I initially attempted to include discussion in my online course, one problem I immediately encountered was a lack of participation. I had assumed that a dozen or more people would be expertly navigating through the course map, easily finding the area where issues were to be discussed, and eagerly seeking an opportunity to raise questions or provide answers. I have since learned that there may be a number of reasons why students might not respond to discussion documents.

> Students can get lost in the maze. It takes a little practice before one realizes that there are areas where assignments are posted or questions raised for discussion.
>
> They may not realize that a discussion area exists and that they are expected to respond to questions by a certain date.

They may be too busy to participate.

They may not think that they need to respond to a particular question, not understand it, or feel they have anything to say.

They may be shy, afraid to open up, or somewhat computer phobic.

They may be waiting until the last minute and try to beat the deadline by 30 seconds.

Since then, I have included more information about accessing the discussions and encouragement in the initial letter to students, the course orientation/syllabus, and first module.

Secondly, to further stimulate discussion, I found it useful to begin with something everyone can do. For example, I began my first unit of discussion with the following question which I labeled a practice question: Why did you register for this course in communication?

By asking a simple question that everyone can answer and by labeling it a practice question, I am able to stimulate a great deal of discussion. Once I get the "log rolling," the students are more likely to participate in the online discussion that is related more directly to the course content.

Testing

So that students can get immediate feedback and find their weaknesses, I have 2-3 short (10-20 question) objective quizzes that are scored, but they are not graded and are used only for self-help. Interestingly, the students tend to do them even though they are not graded. Although they are corrected automatically, students know that I can see how they did on the quizzes, which adds to their motivation to take them seriously. This automatic testing/feedback for diagnostic purposes strikes me as an advantage to online teaching because the students get immediate feedback at their convenience without my having to correct the assignment.

For graded tests I assign "take home" projects that are essentially papers, designed to prompt students to apply the principles, concepts, and techniques discussed in the textbook and/or in class to real life situations, which involves analysis and synthesis. I tell the students that they must clearly identify and incorporate ideas from the text and class like a take home test. To do this, I might then assign them to confront another person about a problem and practice the responses that de-escalate conflict. They would then discuss their experience with the class and write a paper about the relevant principles learned from their readings and how

they observed or applied them in a real life situation. Similarly, I have assigned students to observe a real life conflict or one on a televised situation comedy. I then ask them to share the conflict situation with the class and invite students to analyze and recommend ways to resolve it. They could go to any one of the Usenet Newsgroups where conflicts frequently emerge and identify escalating and de-escalating messages. Of course these are assignments I could do in my regular classroom. (I have heard my colleagues say that teaching on-line has given them ideas to try in the regular classroom.). In this way, students learn that certain attitudes and responses in conflict situations cause it to escalate and get out of hand, while other attitudes and responses tend to de-escalate conflicts.

To encourage students to improve their conceptual and writing skills, I evaluate their papers online, so that each student can see my comments and corrections on his/her paper. I grade the students on content (application of course ideas to their situations), writing ability, and following directions. In addition to using a feature that enables me to make comments/corrections on their papers in red, I append to their corrected papers a "critique sheet" as a form of feedback. I find it useful to post an example for each assigned paper, after I obtaining permission to do so from previous students. This is another advantage with teaching online.

Guest Lecturer

Students' interest is increased when there is a guest "lecturer" even online. In one of my online classes, I e-mailed the author of the textbook and invited her to participate in my course as a virtual guest lecturer. Not only did she provide a couple of interesting "mini-lectures," she responded to all the questions and comments students made after reading what she wrote. The guest lecturer's participation was a high point in the course and provoked a lot of interaction.

Evaluation

Evaluation efforts suggest that students like the learning approach characteristic of SLN's online courses. At the SLN Website, the results of an opinion survey of students taking online courses Fall 1998 and Spring 1999 reveal that they were, in fact, pleased.

- "How satisfied are you with the SUNY Learning Network?" yielded a high level of approval from students ("Satisfied" or "Very Satisfied") - 92.9% in Fall 1998 and 92.4% in Spring 1999.

- "How satisfied are you with on-line learning in general?" yielded a high level of approval from students ("Satisfied" or "Very Satisfied") - 91.9% in Fall 1998 and 91.0% in Spring 1999.

- "How satisfied are you with this course?" yielded a high level of approval from students ("Satisfied" or "Very Satisfied") - 87.7% in Fall 1998 and 88.1% in Spring 1999.

- "Based on your experience, would you consider taking other on-line courses in the future?" yielded a small percentage of respondents that would NOT take another on-line course ("No" or "No-unless necessary due to schedule conflicts") - 6.3% in Fall 1998 and 8.3% in Spring 1999.

Many communication faculty are accustomed to positive student evaluations in their traditional FtoF classes. I believe it is likely that they would continue to receive them online.

I continued to receive high scores on the student evaluation for my first two attempts to teach my course online. Not all the items on the evaluation form were germane to the learning approach, but a few were. The course evaluations made by 18 of the students who took the time to voluntarily complete the questionnaire indicated that 100% of them agreed with the following statements that relate to a student-centered, learning approach to teaching. In addition, many strongly agreed with each.

- The instructor made the objectives of the course clear and achieved them. 78% strongly agreed with this statement.

- The instructor responded to student concerns and questions promptly. 94% strongly agreed with this statement.

- The instructor was regularly involved in class discussions and interaction. 78% strongly agreed with this statement.

- The instructor gave assignments that were appropriately related to the course. 83% strongly agreed with this statement.

Only a few added comments to their standardized evaluation forms. These comments were as follows:

> This course was the best experience in my college career. I would highly recommend...online learning.
>
> Prof. Cahn's class was interesting and though I never met him...I didn't feel any less participation from him as an instructor than if we were in a classroom.

> It was a refreshing course to try online and I think it worked out well.
>
> I really enjoyed this class. I have recommended it to several other students...
>
> Dr. Cahn is an extremely dedicated professor. Whenever I had a concern or question he made sure he was available to help.

I include these data and comments to suggest that the students were generally satisfied by the learning-oriented approach taken in the course.

Conclusion: Process View

One change in teaching behavior that is likely to take place online is a simplification of complex instructions and assignments. Researchers (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Lengel & Daft, 1988) claim that media can be distinguished on the basis of "richness." Media may be richer in terms of immediacy of feedback, multiplicity of cues, and personalization of contact. FtoF interaction is considered the richest, followed in descending order by the telephone, e-mail (which would include computer conferencing), and written communication. These researchers also claim that media richness influences communication process and task outcomes. I have found in my own teaching that I have had to extremely clear instructions on the written and discussion assignments because I am unlike the classroom I am not present to add information or answer immediate questions. Each time I teach the course online I do get a few e-mail or questions in the course itself that causes me to add information or revise instructions on various assignments.

Another change in teaching behavior is that faculty may take a more learning-oriented approach to all classes, online and off. For example, one colleague reported that his online experience has made him more aware of his need to improve as a teacher, which he sees as a good idea.

> To me, preparing this course was almost like starting all over again. It was refreshing, challenging, frustrating, and thought provoking. It's true--you have to seriously think about how you teach, and most of us who have been doing college-level teaching for some time have taken too little time to think about our teaching. So, I see this forced thinking about our teaching as a very positive aspect of preparing and managing an online course.

One more change that may occur in faculty behavior is a shift in perspective from

reliance on traditional modes of course delivery to a process view of teaching. In the past, many faculty have relied on the classroom lecture and assigned readings to deliver their course content to students, and then they tested their students to see if they remembered it. In such courses, students learned the facts, one by one, in a linear way. One of the many pedagogical principles I have learned from my experience teaching online is the importance of taking a process view of course content learning rather than a linear, static view. Thanks to my on-line teaching, I now focus more on how students use the facts or information in interesting, real life, or relevant situations. This is like moving from a test of how much a student remembers to problem solving situations where students not only get information from lectures and textbooks but also apply this knowledge to their lives. As one colleague described how online teaching has affected him, "I am much more concerned with the process rather than the content...The online course ... forced me to think about alternative teaching and learning processes."

Meanwhile new developments in both learning and teaching are in the making. For example, Hornby (1998) is exploring ways to assess individual differences in learning styles, so that courses may be offered in a variety of formats to meet the varying needs and abilities of students. For another, a psychologist (Chronicle, 1998) is developing software tools for reading (and grading) essays online, which could enable teachers to incorporate more writing assignments even in larger classes.

In conclusion, I am suggesting that advocates of online learning and traditional teaching may learn from one another. As teachers continue to find ways to include more traditional assignments (such as writing and testing) online, they are also rethinking the learning activities they rely on in their FtoF classes and focusing more on student outcomes. In both the online courses and new FtoF classes, the students are the benefactors.

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